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ABSTRACT

Despite tremendous strides in educational and professional development, the black professional woman who seeks psychotherapy is often entrapped by a world view based on a very dissonant set of expectations. This world view is based on the belief that possibilities for acceptance on the basis of one's professional characteristics surpass possibilities for acceptance based on personal traits. Perceptions of professional competency contend with perceptions of personal incompetency. Severe motivational symptoms intensified by feelings of unworthiness, hopelessness, and despair exist in relation to this condition. Among its salient determinants are: (1) slavery, the perpetuation and internalization of myths, stereotypes, and other distortions, and (2) significant interpersonal losses. Training programs must strive to achieve a better integration of relevant knowledge, skills, and attitudes to enable psychotherapists to effectively meet the needs of this challenging client population. Additional psychotherapy research will be imperative to facilitate a better understanding of these dissonant expectations as well as other dysfunctional conditions that affect the black woman. (Author/PAS)

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# Dissonant Expectations: Professional Competence Versus Personal Incompetence

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Abstract

Since the great Depression, the black woman in America has made tremendous strides in educational and professional development. Black women are no longer limited exclusively to service occupations but hold key leadership positions in many professional areas. Furthermore, increasing numbers are pursuing careers in more prestigious, remunerative, and non-traditional areas (Burlew, 1982; Epstein, 1973) like business, law, medicine, and engineering.

Despite these changes in career patterns and occupational status, the black professional woman's self-image sometimes encompasses a very dissonant set of expectations. While more positive expectations are internalized in relation to professional endeavors, her outlook on interpersonal relationships is tarnished by more pessimistic expectations (Poussaint, 1980) like "unremitting hardship, frustration, and deprivation" (Beck, 1979, p. 11). Furthermore, she often feels far more confident about her ability to manage a career than the possibility for sustained involvement in satisfying and fulfilling relationships, particularly intimate relationships with black men. Severe motivational symptoms intensified by feelings of unworthiness, hopelessness, and despair exist in relation to this condition.

A sensitivity to and understanding of etiological factors is essential to the formulation of any effective treatment plan for psychotherapy. Inadequate attention has been paid to the black woman as a client by psychotherapists, theoreticians and researchers. Additionally, descriptions and treatment of the black woman have often been pejorative in nature (Jeffries, 1976), and have served as serious

barriers to treatment. Reports of infrequent utilization of mental health services by black women, high premature termination rates, and the tendency to report dissatisfaction with the treatment experience may be related to these injustices.

This paper will first define dissonant expectations incorporating the theories of Atkinson (1964) and Festinger (1957). Salient determinants of dissonant expectations based upon a variety of published and nonpublished perspectives will then be defined. Special attention will be paid to the impact of slavery, the perpetuation and internalization of myths, stereotypes and other distorted perceptions. In addition, a comprehensive analysis of significant interpersonal losses associated with racial, economic, and political oppression will be presented as they relate to dissonant expectations. Recommendations for the integration of relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes into the training of psychotherapists will then be offered. Finally, implications for research will be explored.

## Dissonant Expectations: Professional Competency Versus Personal Incompetency

The black woman has generated much interest among scholars during the past decade as evidenced by historical and literary analyses (Harley and Penn, 1978; Lerner, 1973), sociological perspectives (Staples, 1973) and career development investigations (Smith, 1982). Furthermore, several social and psychological factors have been identified to account for the black professional woman's success in the labor market (Gilkes, 1982; Poussaint, 1982; Grant, 1978; Epstein, 1973). Yet, inadequate attention has been devoted to related psychic conflicts she experiences and their impact on her mental health. While these observations have primarily focused on roles that the black woman has played in the family, community, and labor market, a comprehensive review by O'Leary (1977) revealed that the scope of psychological research is represented by only a few studies in selected areas.

Since the great Depression, the black woman in America has made tremendous strides in educational and professional development. Black women are no longer limited exclusively to service occupations but hold key leadership positions in many professional areas. Furthermore, greater numbers are pursuing careers in more prestigious and remunerative non-traditional areas like business, law, medicine and engineering. The term "non-traditional" as used here is based on an integration of Burlew's (1982) and Epstein's (1973) definitions. "Non-traditional" refers to those more prestigious and remunerative professional areas that have been and continue to be primarily occupied by white

males, where blacks and women have been undervalued and considered inappropriate.

The black professional woman occupies a unique position in our society. Her position encompasses what Leggon (1980) describes as "double ascribed minority statuses ___black and female", and what Epstein (1973) refers to as "a double bind" in that the black professional woman shares in the economic discrimination patterns based on sex which prevail in American society in addition to those economic discrimination patterns imposed on all blacks. Inherent to her unique position and struggle to acquire and sustain professional status are sometimes a variety of social and psychological conflicts. These conflicts have evolved from centuries of racist and sexist oppression and are influenced by significant cultural, economic, and political factors.

Despite the remarkable transition in career patterns and occupational status, psychologists and counselors agree that the black professional woman's self-image often encompasses feelings of personal inadequacy and low self-esteem (Carrington, 1980; Copeland, 1977). In remarks made to an audience of black women in Boston, Massachusetts in 1980, Dr. Ann Ashmore Poussaint, a psychologist and lecturer, broadened this perspective by presenting an even more poignant and critical analysis that seems to bear more distinct relevance to the condition of the black professional woman that seeks psychotherapy. In sum, her analysis maintains that the black woman's expectations in the professional arena are more positive than those she develops in relation to personal issues. More specifically, the black professional woman that seeks

psychotherapy is often entrapped by a world view based on a very dissonant set of expectations. This world view is based on the belief that possibilities for acceptance on the basis of one's professional characteristics (e.g. educational background, experience, special skills, etc.) surpass possibilities for acceptance on the basis of personal characteristics (e.g. physical traits, moral character and other personality attributes). In other words, while more positive expectations are internalized in relation to professional endeavors, her outlook on interpersonal relationships is tarnished by more pessimistic expectations: perceptions of professional competency versus perceptions of personal incompetency. Severe motivational symptoms (e.g. paralysis of the will, escape and avoidance wishes) intensified by feelings of unworthiness, hopelessness, and despair exist in relation to this condition.

Even though the black woman is typically at the very bottom of the occupational pyramid (Epstein, 1973), she often feels far more confident about her ability to manage a career than the possibility for sustained involvement in satisfying and fulfilling relationships, particularly intimate relationships with black men. In simple terms she expects to "win at work" and to "lose at love" (Poussaint, 1980). Although by the most widely accepted standards she may appear successful (i.e. lucrative profession, upward mobility, high regard by colleagues and peers, attractive physical appearance, positive relationships with colleagues and peers) (Carrington, 1980), she finds her prospects for love and marriage seriously threatened. Moreover, managing a career and successful intimate relationships with men, simultaneously, are readily viewed as an impossibility. Hence, some never

give the thought of having both a career and an intimate relationship serious consideration; others, who once considered the possibility, eventually give up.

The whole notion of professional competency versus personal incompetency suggests that the black professional woman views her condition in terms of conflicting abilities. However, Moore (1982a) contends that the true dissonance involves motivation. That is, a subtle or even marked contrast may exist between one's verbally expressed desires for a successful relationship and the actual behavioral methods employed to achieve this goal. Among other things this suggests that the woman with dissonant expectations may be less motivated to achieve a successful relationship than a successful career.

Atkinson (1964) provides a relevant theoretical framework with which to view this phenomenon. In his theory of achievement motivation "achievement-related behavior is conceptualized as a result of a conflict situation (p. 195)." It is assumed that "the cues associated with competition against a standard of excellence arouse both the hope of success and the fear of failure. The strength of the approach tendency toward the goal (the hope of success) relative to the strength of the avoidance tendency (the fear of failure) determines whether the individual will locomote toward or away from achievement-related tasks (p. 195)" For those with dissonant expectations, the fear of failure seems to exceed the hope of success. Consequently, these women may approach the task of improving relationships half-heartedly or avoid it altogether. However, according to Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance (1957), "whenever people engage in behaviors they do not believe in, they will be uncomfortable because their behavior is inconsistent

with their beliefs. . . (Hilgard et al 1979, p. 528)". Thus, unless a state of consonance is reached through secondary gains or punishment, one will be motivated to resolve the dissonance. It is at this point that psychotherapy can be helpful.

Because a sensitivity to and understanding of etiological factors is essential to the formulation of any effective treatment plan for psychotherapy, some salient determinants of dissonant expectations will be identified. Additionally, a comprehensive analysis of significant interpersonal losses associated with racial, economic, and political oppression as they relate to dissonant expectations will be presented. Recommendations for the integration of relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes into the training of psychotherapists will then be offered. Finally, implications for research will be explored.

Salient Determinants of Dissonant Expectations

Slavery, the perpetuation and internalization of myths, stereotypes, and other distortions

On the basis of historical accounts of the black African woman's social and economic status prior to the late seventeenth century, it seems that her lifestyle was relatively stable and harmonious. From early childhood she was exposed to social and cultural conditions that facilitated the development of a healthy mind and body. By the time she reached early womanhood proper socialization to the values, ideas, beliefs, and behavioral patterns of her society had taken place. One social expectation included the highly regarded cultural expectation that one day she would become wife, mother and worker and would fulfill and manage her duties and responsibilities in all three roles effectively, simultaneously. Her ability to fulfill this expectation effec-

tively reflected healthy psychological adjustment and proper socialization. Although childrearing took precedence over the other roles, the black African woman was able to fulfill her roles as wife and mother (although they differed somewhat from those of our Western society) and was quite instrumental in the marketplace. Rose (1980) describes her as having had economic status, independently wealthy, a trader with her own earnings and in control of certain industries. This took place within the context of a traditional patriarchal society where sacrifice, hard work, and silence constituted the underlying rules of her existence (Gillespie, 1982). This relatively peaceful existence was destined for change, however, as slave catchers terrorized the shores of West Africa from the late seventeenth century until the early 19th century.

The literature strongly suggests, then, that the onset of dissonant expectations among black women in America occurred as early as the late seventeenth century when the first African maidens were suddenly abducted, gruesomely transported and sold into the abominable institution of slavery. Slavery was, indeed, a pervasive and oppressive institution that critically altered the black African woman's reality and, thus, the healthy expectations she had been socialized to believe in from an early age on. The abrupt and sometimes permanent separation from loved ones, the forced relinquishment of freedom, disrespect for and depreciation of West African heritage, devaluation to sub-human status, ___ the losses and culture-shock caused by enslavement were, indeed, infinite, traumatic, emotionally and physically debilitating.

Slaves were considered chattel rather than human beings with intellect, feelings, and dignity. Therefore, it was justifiable, from

the slaveowner's perspective, to subject his "property" to inhumane working conditions, to torture them mentally and physically, and to sexually abuse the women frequently. Slaves were deprived of the very conditions that are crucial for the continuous development, enhancement and maintenance of a positive self-image. Instead, there was an obsessive preoccupation with ultimate destruction via blatant efforts to replace pride with shame, dignity with disgrace, and self-esteem with self-devaluation. Second to breeding capacity, the slave woman was perceived as a laborer. Her roles as wife and mother were often disregarded since her existence was perceived primarily in relation to maintaining or elevating her "owner's" economic position. For practically four centuries, she was socialized to perceive herself solely in terms of productivity, both biological and economic. The only motive for praising her or making other gestures of approval was to reinforce such productivity. Meanwhile, her personal development was basically ignored. Moreover, her physical characteristics, personal traits and role within her own family were degraded and, eventually, labeled "deviant" (Moynihan, 1965). Yet, the impact of slavery on her lifestyle seems to have been basically ignored. Davis (1982), Rose (1980), and Lerner (1973) provide more extensive reviews and documentaries of the social, psychological and cultural transitions experienced by black African women during their prolonged tenure of involuntary servitude in the United States.

In view of this analysis, it does, indeed seem plausible that dissonant expectations among some black women who seek psychotherapy today emanate from socialization processes that were imposed on their ancestors as early as the slavery era. As stated earlier, the worth of the

slave woman was defined solely in terms of productivity, that is, the number of children she gave birth to (for they, too, were destined to become of economic value to the slaveowner) and the economic worth of her labor on the plantation.

Although her West African heritage emphasized sacrifice, hard work and silence, it did not inflict the demoralizing conditions of slavery. Gillespie (1982) offers a solemn description of this situation: "In slavery we learned how to bear humiliation, pain and cruelty, to be chattel of both men and the system and yet to mask our pain, our needs and our rage (p. 58)." The oppressive mentality that was inherent to this situation was gradually internalized across generations and incorporated into the black woman's perceptions of her race as well as perceptions of herself. Of course, some incorporated these perceptions to a greater degree than others. Nevertheless, painful intrapsychic and interpersonal conflicts resulted; intraracial division eventually prevailed. The subsequent perpetuation of myths, stereotypes and other distorted perceptions of the black woman like "Mammy" and "Jemima" within the context of racial discrimination have continued to reinforce the denial and rejection of her physical characteristics (i.e. ebony skin color, dark kinky hair, dark eye color, full lips,etc.) since they differ from white standards of beauty (i.e. fair skin color, blue eyes, blonde hair, thin lips, etc.). Also her femininity, moral character and other favorable characteristics have been confused, denied or basically ignored as a result of distorted perceptions like "Sapphire", "Superwoman" and the myth of the "Strong black woman".

Distorted perceptions have invaded every aspect of the social fabric via textbooks, the literature, the media, artists' perceptions,

unscientific studies that have been contaminated by defective research designs, biases and conjectures, as well as other persuasive sources of communication. Despite insurmountable obstacles, the black woman has struggled to preserve her sanity and the basic tenets of her West African heritage. Hence, family bonding, respect for motherhood, and the strong work orientation have sustained across generations.

Even though radical changes have taken place in society since the abolition of slavery more than a century ago, significant traces of the attitudes, emotions and social practices prevalent during the slavery era remain internalized and incorporated into the perceptions of some black professional women. Thus, dissonant expectations seem to be a legacy of slavery. Just as this phenomenon often eludes the awareness of the young, attractive, verbal, intelligent, successful (Schofield's YAVIS Syndrome, 1964) black professional woman, it may easily escape the attention of the psychotherapist who merely focuses on immediate and external treatment issues.

Significant Interpersonal Losses

Another salient determinant of dissonant expectations are losses experienced during the developmental years that impair the development of healthy self-esteem. These losses may be characterized by temporary separation from or the invariable absence of a significant other. They may be experienced physically or emotionally and precipitated by a variety of stressful conditions that frustrate one's needs for nurturance. Often such conditions have occurred secondarily to elements of racial, economic and political oppression but may not readily appear to be so, particularly in this more socially acceptable client population. Finally, these losses may have occurred intergenerationally. Parents, too,

may have suffered similar losses that remain unresolved. Consequently, they, unwittingly, may have passed on related effects.

Absence of a parental figure. This loss may have been caused by a variety of circumstances. Among the more temporary ones could have been financial pressures that necessitated employment in another location, welfare qualification requirements that might have necessitated the absence of the father from the home, and enlistment in the armed forces. However, marital separation or divorce, prolonged emotional or physical illness, or premature death might have lead to more extensive or permanent absences.

Prolonged illness or death of a parental figure sometimes occurred for the following reasons: (1) limited access to appropriate mental or physical health care resources due to factors like poverty, racial discrimination, and federal cutbacks in social programs, (2) violent crime secondary to stressful social conditions, (3) war, and (4) general inability to cope effectively with problems in daily living. In some cases, these circumstances exacerbated pre-existing emotional disturbances or physical illnesses, or, perhaps, influenced the onset of others.

Preoccupation with survival needs and upward mobility through education. Common to the family background of many professional black women is a strong work orientation and a high regard for education. Both parents have sometimes maintained employment under extraordinary conditions for two reasons: (1) to satisfy the basic survival needs of the family, and (2) to insure a better future for their offspring through education. Overtime hours that have often included nights and weekends, or two or more jobs have been commonplace. Additionally, ordinary job-related stresses have often been agitated by the burden

of racism. Consequently, opportunities to spend time with family members might have been limited. Also, physical and emotional fatigue have reduced parental capacities for nurturance during critical periods of development. Therefore, the psychological needs for acceptance, warmth, and affection might have gone unfulfilled. Furthermore, such an emotional climate and other factors may have led to the daughter's inability to fully entrust her welfare to others. This is not to be confused, however, with lack of love, for these parents have usually loved and continue to love their daughters considerably, and have only desired for them a life better than their own. They are usually unaware of the impact that preoccupation with survival needs and upward mobility through education has had on their daughters' social and emotional development.

Lack of exposure to the stresses of everyday living. Harsh social realities may cause some parents to overprotect their young from the ordinary stresses of everyday life. This has been particularly true for female children. The development of self-esteem is closely related to one's ability to meet everyday challenges effectively. A possible outcome of overprotection is impaired self-esteem since opportunities to gain confidence in one's abilities are limited. Consequently, it is unlikely that an adequate coping capacity for the inevitable stresses of everyday life will develop. Moreover, the slightest discomfort is likely to be viewed as a catastrophe. Because low self-esteem leads to self-doubt, the development of dissonant expectations is highly probable.

Estrangement from family of origin. In a study on the high costs in professionalism among minority women in psychotherapy, Flowers

(1979) found that 30% of her sample felt that their professional careers and life changes relative to occupational status estranged them from their families of origin. While some families have a high regard for education, others are ambivalent, suspicious of or threatened by the new and different opportunities it affords. This occurs for a variety of reasons including inability to fully appreciate its value because of deprived educational backgrounds intergenerationally, immobilized hope due to years of oppression, and perceptions of blacks who have "made it" as having sold out to establishment America. A seemingly loss of sensitivity to and lack of concern for the plight of "their own" by successful blacks usually triggers these perceptions. Therefore, even while in pursuit of higher education, prospective black professional women may have been unconsciously or consciously viewed by their families as "traitors". This phenomenon has been observed particularly in the experiences of first gereration professionals (Espin and Rodriguez-Nogues, 1981). It is evidenced by such peculiarities as withdrawal of emotional and financial support, jealous comments and actions, denial or devaluation of academic and personal accomplishments, frequent tests of loyalty, and at times, silent ostracism by family members.

Dissatisfying and unfulfilling intimate relationships with black men. In addition to the usual achievement-related conflicts faced by professional women in our society, the black professional woman often experiences dissatisfying and unfulfilling relationships, particularly intimate relationships with black men. Harsh social realities, impaired interpersonal skills, and the options afforded by alternative lifestyles often limit possibilities for desirable intimate relationships. For some these conditions reinforce and perpetuate the development of dis-

sonant expectations by creating a viscious cycle from which the black woman finds it difficult to free herself. Self-defeating coping strategies are frequently employed. One of the most prevalent ones has been identified by Dr. Ann Ashmore Poussaint (1982) and Audrey Edwards, a free-lance writer (1982). Their observations have revealed that black women sometimes reject men who possess positive relationship qualities and become involved instead in relationships that have limited probability for success (e.g. rendezvous with married men, affairs with inattentive, economically exploitative, uncaring or rejecting types that have shallow capacities for emotional commitment, etc.). Such relationships are often prolonged and repetitive. They are also sadomasochistic and emotionally debilitating. Furthermore, they practically insure the probability for the social rejection that the woman with dissonant expectations often believes she deserves. As a result, she may become incapacitated by symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Internalization of the distorted racial perceptions mentioned earlier are often a constant source of emotional conflict for the professional black woman. She is torn between a need to be assertive and independent, but also fearful that she may emasculate and alienate the black male (Copeland, 1977). This is further complicated by the fact that many black males have internalized the same perceptions. Consequently, studies have revealed that even as early as the college years, many black women, particularly those in predominantly white universities, have difficulties in dating black men (Wright, 1978; Epstein, 1973). As time goes on, the situation becomes even more discouraging for some who desire the emotional and financial security of marriage. In interviews with successful professional black women, Epstein (1973) found

that marriage is by no means a certainty for this population. Furthermore, the already limited supply of single professional black men is further reduced by preferences for cross-racial relationships and homosexuality. A substantial proportion of those eligible professional black males that remain opt for other alternative lifestyles like living together as an unmarried couple, living alone, or single parenthood. Moreover, if she marries a college-educated man, some writers (Copeland, 1977; Epstein, 1973) contend that the barriers he may encounter in the marketplace often necessitate shared financial responsibilities in order to acquire a middle-class standard of living. In addition, blacks are more likely than whites to experience marital separation and divorce. Remarriage rates are also decreasing. In spite of these conditions, some black women do not feel anxious about marriage and may marry later or not at all. Others, according to Bell (1971), may not feel threatened by marrying men whose occupational status may be below their own.

Whether or not intimate relationships with black men have primarily involved dating or marriage, it appears that most professional black women have experienced at least one unsuccessful relationship. However, ego strength, emotional maturity and the qualities it facilitates (i.e. optimism, resilience, adaptability, flexibility, etc.) often eventually lead to more satisfying and fulfilling relationships. The woman with dissonant expectations is often ashamed of prior failures. Furthermore, she may lack the supportive environment or the personal qualities that would enable her to overcome them independently of psychotherapy.

## The Training of Psychotherapists:
## An Integration of Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes

Helms (1979) recommends knowledge, skills and attitudes as basic principles for the treatment of black women. Colleges and universities must begin to take more responsibility for the treatment of this population by developing training programs that are based on these principles. In addition to the provision of traditional curriculum, institutions of higher learning must broaden awareness and enhance sensitivity to social and cultural issues relevant to this population. Awareness and sensitivity require an understanding and tact that can only be derived from intimate knowledge of the black woman and her culture. Therefore, exposure to the following issues is crucial: the history of the black woman in America (Davis, 1982), contemporary politics as they affect the black woman (Helms, 1979), barriers in the job market, the sex-role conflicts perpetuated by cultural-occupational inconsistencies (Epstein, 1973), psycho-social development of the black woman within the black family, male-female relationships (Moore, 1982b), intergenerational relationships (Daniel, 1982), conflicts in parent-child communication (Frauenhofer, 1982), and differentiation between the diverse needs of various subgroups of black women, particularly along the parameters of educational background and occupational status. Furthermore, textbooks and articles by black authors need to be integrated into the curriculum to reflect a more realistic perspective of the black experience. Practicums and internships must also offer relevant applied training experiences with more opportunities for supervision by qualified black psychotherapists.

Dissonant expectations are usually associated with symptoms of depression and anxiety. Carrington (1980), Lazarus (1966) and Meichenbaum (1977) have demonstrated the crucial role of cognitive factors in

the production and alleviation of these disorders. Carrington's (1980) findings have particular relevance to black professional women with dissonant expectations. She contends that cognitive therapy is highly effective in counteracting the socialization process that fosters a "negative identity" (p. 269) in some black women. Cognitive models can reverse dissonant expectations by: (1) identifying faulty processes that underlie this conditon, (2) examining and evaluating the client's system of logic; and (3) modifying unrealistic and self-defeating cognitions resulting in self-destructive behaviors (Beck, 1976). Along with the reinforcement of strengths (Jeffries,1976), revitalization of self-mastery and self-control (Carrington, 1980), cognitive models can replace dissonant expectations with a more harmonious and functional world view.

The development of positive therapist characteristics and relationship-enhancement methods are essential to the treatment of this population. In addition, flexibility, a directive stance, and consideration of the cultural milieu are also necessary. The therapist also must be able to distinguish between problems caused by internal dynamics and those that stem from societal injustices. Finally,a working knowledge of miscellaneous community support services with a sensitivity to the needs of women (e.g. financial counseling, legal services, auto repair consultation, etc.) and professional networks for black women are necessary since advocacy needs to be a significant component of treatment.

An effective integration of knowledge, skills and attitudes will enable the psychotherapist to effectively meet the treatment needs of this challenging client population.

Personal therapy can also be valuable to the aspiring young therapist. For it can free him/her of attitudes as well as other overt and hidden barriers that suppress potential to render effective psychotherapy. The exploration, clarification and examination of attitudes and moralistic judgements directed toward black women, personal values, and more generally, the extent to which distorted perceptions have been internalized (intentionally or unintentionally), can lead to resolution of prejudice, fear, ambivalence, and hostility. Thus, personal adjustment is likely to be enhanced.

## Implications for Research

Research is needed that will enable psychotherapists to understand dissonant expectations more thoroughly. Such an effort will necessitate scientific investigations of the black female at various psycho-social stages of development, further identification of the internal and external pressures she experiences and their impact on her capacity to function. The impact of racism, sexism, and alternative life-styles would also be useful to explore. Moreover, there is a need to differentiate between the diverse needs of various subgroups of black women in America, particularly along the parameters of educational background, occupational status, marital status, social class background, and culture of origin. Are some groups of black women more vulnerable to dissonant expectations than others? Are some treatment modalities more effective with some groups than others? Finally, there is a need to identify specific barriers to effective treatment among various subgroups to determine how they can be minimized. Investigation of these issues would heighten sensitivity, facilitate a better understanding, and lead to more effective psychotherapy for the black woman.

## Summary

The black professional woman that seeks psychotherapy is often entrapped by a world view based on a very dissonant set of expectations. This world view is based on the belief that possibilities for acceptance on the basis on one's professional characterisitics surpass possibilities for acceptance on the basis of personal traits: perceptions of professional competency versus perceptions of personal incompetency. Severe motivational symptoms intensified by feelings of unworthiness, hopelessness, and despair exist in relation to this condition.

Among the salient determinants of this condition are: (1) slavery, the perpetuation and internalization of myths, stereotypes and other distortions, and (2) significant interpersonal losses.

Training programs must strive to achieve a better integration of relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes to enable psychotherapists to effectively meet the needs of this challenging client population.

Additional psychotherapy research will be imperative for facilitating a better understanding of dissonant expectations as well as other dysfunctional conditions that affect the black woman.

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